

4VAC15-50-91. Game: Bear: Checking Bear by Persons Exempt from License Requirements or Holding a License Authorization Number.

Summary:

This proposal would allow an option for a person exempt from license requirements or holding a license authorization number to check bears electronically while still requiring the necessary biological samples to be submitted.

Proposed language of amendment:

4VAC15-50-91. Checking Bear and Tooth Submission by Persons Exempt from License Requirements or Holding a License Authorization Number.

A. Upon killing a bear, any person (i) exempt from license requirements as prescribed in § 29.1-301 of the Code of Virginia, ~~or (ii) issued a complimentary license as prescribed in § 29.1-339, or (iii) the holder of holding a permanent license issued pursuant to § 29.1-301 E, or (iv) the holder of holding a Virginia~~ license authorization number issued by a telephone or electronic media agent pursuant to § 29.1-327 B of the Code of Virginia shall, upon vehicle transport of the carcass or at the conclusion of legal hunting hours, whichever occurs first, and without unnecessary delay, present the carcass to an authorized bear checking station or to any appropriate representative of the department in the county or adjoining county in which the bear was killed, or report the kill through the department's automated harvest reporting system. At such time, the person checking or reporting the carcass shall be given a black bear check card furnished by the department or a confirmation number from the automated reporting system. If checked at a bear check station, the black bear check card must be kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, the black bear check card must be securely attached to the carcass. If the kill is reported using the automated harvest reporting system, the successful hunter shall immediately create written documentation including the successful hunter's full name, the date the animal was killed and the confirmation number. This written documentation must be kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the automated harvest reported carcass is transferred to the possession of another individual, the written documentation must be transferred with the carcass to the individual and kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, this written documentation must be securely attached to the carcass. Processed carcass parts of a black bear killed legally in Virginia may be transported; however, upon request of any authorized law enforcement officer, sufficient verbal or written information necessary to properly establish legal possession must be furnished immediately.

~~B. If the bear is checked at a~~ Upon presentation of the carcass to the bear checking station, the person checking the carcass shall surrender or allow to be removed one premolar tooth from the carcass. ~~At such time, the person checking or reporting the carcass shall be given a game check card furnished by the department. The game check card must be kept in possession with the carcass until the carcass is processed. If the carcass is left unattended, the game check card must be securely attached to the carcass.~~ If the kill is reported through the department's automated harvest reporting system, a premolar must be removed by the hunter immediately after reporting the kill. The premolar shall be placed in an envelope furnished by the department and labeled with the hunter's full name, check confirmation number, date of kill and the sex of the harvested bear. This envelope with premolar and accompanying information must be mailed/delivered to the department no later than 14 days after the close of the bear harvest season.

~~B-C.~~ It shall be unlawful for any person to destroy the identity of the sex of any bear killed until the bear is checked as required by this section. Successful bear hunters are allowed to dismember the carcass to pack it out from the place of kill as long as they do not destroy the identity of the sex and all the parts of the carcass are present when the bear is checked at a big game an authorized bear check station or reported through the automated harvest reporting system. Any bear that has not been checked (via an

43 authorized bear check station or the automated harvest system) as required by this section found in the
44 possession of any person exempt from license requirements or holding a license authorization number
45 shall be forfeited to the Commonwealth to be disposed of as provided by law.

Rationale

Since 1947, data collected through the DGIF's big game check station system have been the cornerstone of Virginia's bear, deer, and turkey management programs. This system has allowed DGIF to effectively monitor annual big game harvests on a county basis for over 60 years. By regulation, successful bear hunters are required to "tag" every harvested bear at the place of kill and subsequently check it at a check station to receive an official game check card. Information regarding the animal's sex, date of kill, weapon, and county of kill is recorded. Prior to 1991, all check stations (~1,500) were also authorized to check bears. To ensure additional quality in bear harvest data, regulation changes for the 1991 bear hunting season designated about 60 special bear checking stations. In addition to recording the usual harvest data (e.g., sex, weapon, location), these volunteer bear check stations also record whether bear hounds were used, extract a small premolar tooth for age determination, attach a special harvest seal to the carcass, and determine presence of ear tags or lip tattoos (indicative of previous capture for research or relocation in conflict situations). Today, more than 140 bear check stations are maintained throughout Virginia, and a tooth is collected from more than 95% of harvested bears. The age information resulting from the premolar provides key data for population reconstruction and is also of interest to hunters. Along with harvest trends, population reconstruction provides an index of both statewide and regional population changes.

Beginning in 2004, a telephone-checking option was introduced to supplement the traditional check station system for deer and spring turkeys. The proportion of the deer harvest reported electronically via phone, internet, and the mobile app has grown from 44% in 2004 to 85% in 2018. To maintain the integrity of data collected at special bear check stations (especially collection of teeth for aging), checking bears by telephone was not permitted. Due to technological advances, it is now possible to make the bear harvest checking procedure more convenient for hunters while ensuring the continued collection of sufficient biological and hunter data necessary for management decisions.